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AUTHOR Godfrey, Dennis
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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to enact Rivers' (1971 and 1972) urgings to base ESL listening instruction on both psychological and linguistic findings and contends that advanced ESL students' listening needs call for improvement in processing spoken English discourse. Psychological data on memory span is cited to demonstrate that advanced ESL students differ from intermediate ESL students and from native speakers in processing capacity of a particular type. Linguistic discourse analysis findings are cited to demonstrate the types of clues and continuities ESL listeners must attend to if they are to adequately comprehend spoken English discourse. A three-phase approach of listening instruction and practice for advanced ESL students is proposed to meet the discourse processing needs discussed. Phase One consists of practice aimed toward increasing students' familiarity with and accuracy in processing intrasentential items and thus toward reducing the processing time devoted to intrasentential items. Phase Two pushes students to expand the time they have left over for processing discourse relations by requiring them to perform operations beyond those necessary for processing individual sentences. Phase Three consists of instruction in the types of discourse clues and continuities available to listeners and practice in attending to such clues and continuities. (Author)

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LISTENING INSTRUCTION AND PRACTICE FOR ADVANCED ESL STUDENTS[1]

Dennis Godfrey

The University of Michigan
English Language Institute & Department of Linguistics

[1]This paper was presented to the Ninth Annual Meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, March 6, 1975, in Los Angeles, California. Appreciation is expressed to H. Joan Morley, whose suggestions were invaluable in preparing this final draft. Of course, any shortcomings the paper has remain the author's responsibility.

In papers published in 1971 and 1972, Rivers has presented convincing arguments for basing ESL listening instruction on both psychological and linguistic findings. In this paper I will argue the same general point, but I will depart from Rivers in the attention I pay to spoken discourse. Inasmuch as Rivers' attention is focused more directly on listeners' processing of sentences, she does not discuss the differences between relations within the sentence and relations that extend beyond the sentence. My attention in this paper is directed toward explicating the relations that extend beyond the sentence and their relevance to listening materials for advanced ESL students. But there is an additional significance for this investigation, namely, that with more and more emphasis in TESL on communication in context, the need to examine issues related to discourse processing and discourse relations is becoming more and more pressing for ESL teachers.

Recently, more adequate listening materials for ESL students have begun to appear. Morley's Improving Aural Comprehension for beginning-to-intermediate students, Crymes, James, Smith and

FL 007 185

Taylor's Developing Fluency in English for high-intermediate-to-advanced students, and Hughes' (1974) report on listening comprehension exercises have helped to fill some voids in available materials. The learning materials I suggest in this paper help to fill additional voids and, in fact, could be used to supplement the above materials. To emphasize this point, I have used a segment of a conversation from the Crymes, James, Smith, and Taylor book as the basis for all my examples. It should also be noted that not all the exercises suggested are original or even new; it is primarily the ends to which they are applied that I believe to be original.

I will begin by examining some data relevant to advanced ESL listeners' needs drawn from psycholinguistic investigations in Part 1 and from linguistic investigations in Part 2. In Part 3 I will attempt to show how specific types of practice and instruction are called for by the evidence of Parts 1 and 2. It will be obvious as we proceed, that the empirical data is far from complete. Hopefully the reader will bear with me as I speculatively fill in major gaps in the available data and will realize that this demonstration eagerly awaits the revisions that additional evidence most certainly will require.

1. Psycholinguistic Input - To begin our description of what advanced ESL students' processing of spoken English is like, casual observation can tell us at least the following: (1) advanced students have difficulty understanding certain unstressed words, such as contracted and reduced forms; (2) they complain of not understanding normal speech because it

is too fast; and (3) they seem to process spoken English sentence-by-sentence or even phrase-by-phrase and have difficulty relating one sentence to another and to the discourse as a whole.

Rivers (1971 & 1972) has observed that even though advanced ESL adults can recognize the essential items in a spoken message, they cannot retain what they have recognized. The process of recognition takes up all their attention, leaving them insufficient processing time for rehearsal of the information. The difficulty in recognition, she claims, is due to the advanced ESL listeners' relative lack of familiarity with the language and thus his inability to anticipate and distinguish between low and high information items. Having insufficient time left over for rehearsal, the listener is unable to retain information adequately and is constrained in his ability to relate the information to what has preceded and to what follows in the discourse.

These observations by Rivers and the casual observations we made earlier, it must be noted, are merely observations. The question we must entertain now is: what psycholinguistic data is there to confirm or deny our suspicions. To my knowledge, there is no data for ESL students on information rehearsal, nor on attending to and relating information to other elements in the discourse. However, there is one step that has been researched, namely memory span, which I take to be involved in the ability to concentrate on crucial elements.

Studies by Lado, Glicksberg, and others clearly show that memory span for foreign speakers is shorter than for native

speakers. Also, as proficiency in the target language improves, the differential between foreign and native speakers' memory spans decreases.

Lado (1965) reports on memory span for digits for fourteen native English and native Spanish speakers who were also of comparable proficiency in each others' languages. Thirteen of the subjects were consistently able to repeat longer series of digits in their native language than in the foreign language, with a difference of approximately 1.6 digits. Glicksberg (1963) reports on memory span for digits, for one grammatical pattern (prepositional phrase), and for sentences related in context. Subjects were 40 foreign students in a seven-week intensive English course and eleven native English speaking university students. Glicksberg's results show for all three types of material that memory span is shorter for foreign speakers of English than for native speakers of English. For 23 of the foreign students tested whose native language was Spanish, Glicksberg also administered the memory span tests in Spanish and found likewise that subjects' memory spans were shorter on all tests for their foreign language than for their native language. In addition, Glicksberg's data for all 40 foreign subjects shows that memory span in English increased on all measures during the seven weeks of the intensive course.

In sum, the data show that even the advanced foreign language students tested had not yet reached native proficiency in memory span. Until the foreign language student reaches

native proficiency, his memory span fails to hold certain of the presented information in short-term storage long enough for rehearsal, and thus he is not able to retain that information, nor is he able to relate it to preceding and following information in the discourse.

2. Linguistic Input - The above discussion seems to indicate that there are aspects of the discourse that the advanced student does not have the processing capacity left over to attend to. Unfortunately, psycholinguistic data is not available at this time that will allow us to isolate which aspects of discourse are attended to by foreign speakers and which are not. We need to examine, then, some linguistic analyses of discourse to identify some of the features that advanced ESL students might possibly be missing. In the following discussion, the linguists I cite represent different approaches being taken to discourse analysis. While meandering through some of their findings and techniques, I will attempt to demonstrate what information from discourse analysis might prove relevant to the development of second language listening skills.

K. Gordon and K. Pike (1973) have used a method of paired sentence reversal to isolate form and meaning relationships in spoken discourse. The authors reversed pairs of sentences within a discourse and asked a native informant to make the grammatical adjustments necessary to preserve the discourse. The types of finding they encountered will be illustrated here by analyzing a segment of a conversation, item 1. below, which is reported in the Crymes, James, Smith, and Taylor book. (Sentence

numbering is added for ease of reference.)

1. CRAIG: Nonverbal communication? What's that?

   ART: (1) Well that's a way of communicating with people but without using words. (2) For example, gestures and movements. (3) Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it. (4) My friend and I were going to a restaurant and we wanted to park our car at the restaurant's parking lot. (5) The attendant motioned to us to park at a certain stall but I thought it was kind of inconvenient--there was one much closer--so without saying anything I pointed at the other stall, indicating that I'd like to park at that one, but the attendant motioned with his hand "No," and pointed at the first one again indicating that I should park there. (6) I nodded and parked my car there. (7) No, no words had passed between us, and yet we understood each other. (25-26)

If we reverse sentences (1) and (2) as in item 2. below, we find no major grammatical adjustments have to be made, and no major violence is done to the meaning of the discourse.

2. ART: (2) Well that's like gestures and movements, for example. (1) It's a way of communicating with people but without using words. (3) Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it...

But if instead we reverse sentences (2) and (3), as in item 3., major adjustments have to be made.

3. ART: (1) Well that's a way of communicating with people but without using words. (3) Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it. (2) Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention that some examples of it are gestures and movements. (4) Anyway, my friend and I were...

The close relation of sentences (1) and (2) is signalled by the words "Oh, I forgot to mention that...," which is another way of the speaker saying that sentence (2) really belongs with sentence (1) but that something extraordinary happened such that it did not get into its normal position in the discourse.

Similarly, the word "Anyway" in sentence (4) signals that something--in this case, sentence (2)--has interrupted a sequence that has begun and that it is now time to resume that sequence. From item 3., then, we can see that sentences (1) and (2) group together and sentence (3) groups with at least sentence (4). From item 2. we saw that changing the order within a group of sentences is less disruptive than interrupting a group.

In item 4., the sentence (1)-sentence (2) group is maintained, but it is interposed within the sentence (3)-sentence (6) group.

4. CRAIG: Nonverbal communication? What's that?
ART: (3) Well, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it. (1) You see, it's a way of communicating with people but without using words. (2) For example, gestures and movements. (4) Anyway, my friend and I were...

Appropriate adjustments have to be made--such as the parenthetical "You see" in sentence (1)--but on a different plane, the role of the sentence (1)-sentence (2) group has changed. No longer is it a statement of the definition plus an example, nor is the sentence (3)-sentence (6) group merely an illustration supporting the abstract definition. Instead, the speaker's whole response has become a definition by illustration, and sentences (1) and (2) have become parenthetical background material used to assist the reader in understanding the illustration.

For the advanced ESL listener, who is having difficulty attending to much more than one sentence or phrase at a time, there is bound to be difficulty in detecting the relationships that bind sentences into groups and the roles that such sentence groups play in the discourse. The assumption to be made

here is that native English listeners can and do detect such relations and roles, while ESL listeners can not and do not detect them as well. Given a less-than-native performance by ESL listeners, it further remains to be determined what proportion of such a difficulty is to be attributed to less-than-native processing capacity and what proportion might be due to so-called "interference" from the native language. (See Kaplan [1966] for one opinion regarding "interference" in paragraph development for writing.)

A second linguistic approach to discourse is represented by Halliday and Hasan (forthcoming) who examine discourse for cohesion. Cohesion is a quality that binds elements in a discourse together, and it consists in the duality of (1) the elements that presuppose the existence of some other element for their interpretation and (2) the elements that are presupposed. To cite one example, the use of a pronoun in a sentence presupposes that an antecedent for that pronoun exists elsewhere in the discourse. The relation of the pronoun to its antecedent contributes a cohesion that helps bind the discourse together.

Halliday and Hasan make the important point that were it not for cohesion, a listener (or reader) could not interpret a discourse. One can conclude from this that for ESL listeners to adequately understand spoken English discourse, they must be able to attend to the cohesive relations that bind it together: they must be able to identify which elements in a discourse enter into cohesive relations, plus be able to specify the types of relation that hold between these elements.

Another approach to discourse analysis is taken by Chafe (1972), who seeks to characterize the relation between what speakers know about the world and what they say in discourse. Chafe posits inherent features to capture permanent knowledge of the world, such as that rocks are hard, and contextual features to capture the concept that certain knowledge changes during a discourse, such as the identifiability of an item being discussed. To handle changeable knowledge, he introduces contextual rules to identify the initiators of transitory phenomena in a discourse. The initiator invokes a temporary constraint which remains in effect until a terminator is encountered; this terminator may in turn serve as an initiator for a subsequent temporary constraint. To illustrate, let's return to the example in item 1.

1. ART: (1) Well that's a way of communicating with people but without using words. (2) For example, gestures and movements. (3) Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it. (4) My friend and I were going...

The word "yesterday" in sentence (3) serves as an initiator for the use of the past tense in "happened" in sentence (3) and "were going" in sentence (4). This tense remains in effect until the end. If a new time were to be introduced in an eighth sentence, it would be signalled by a simultaneously terminating and initiating item, such as "tomorrow" in (8) "Tomorrow, I won't try to argue with the man."

The significance of Chafe's work for ESL students lies in the realization of what information is assumed to be constant

throughout a sequence of utterances and what signals initiate and terminate the assumption of that information. If an ESL student can be made aware, for example, that tenses tend to continue unless a change is overtly signalled, then a basis for comprehending the relatedness of one utterance to another will be established. In addition, it is possible that instruction of ESL students in such linguistic rules would make items like tense markers--once initiated--low information items for them, and items like terminators and initiators high information items.

A final group of linguists has contributed substantially to understanding the types of sequencing rules that determine certain aspects of natural conversation. Schegloff (1968) has examined opening sequences in telephone conversations to formulate rules for when the caller speaks and when the answerer speaks, and he has noted the forms and the implications that violations of these rules have. Labov (1972) formalizes a rule of discourse involving question-answer sequences to the effect that when a speaker makes an indirect response to a request, there must be some proposition known to both speakers that can be inferred as connecting the request and the response. Labov cites the following example to illustrate:

4. A: Are you going to work tomorrow (U_1)
   B: I'm on jury duty. (U_2)
   A: Couldn't you get out of it? (U_3)
   B: We tried everything. (U_4) (123)

According to Labov, in order for (U_2) to be seen as a response to the question in (U_1), the statement "I'm on jury duty" must be interpreted as "'I'm not going to work because I'm on jury

duty.'" Such inferences might be quite difficult for the ESL listener to grasp, an indication that instruction in sequencing rules might be helpful for him.

To summarize our findings from discourse analysis, at least the following information is either available to the listener in spoken English discourse or must be supplied by the listener: (1) that segments of discourse are identifiable as related units, (2) that certain devices can be identified which bind elements in a discourse together and allow them to be interpreted, (3) that continuities and signals for changes in the continuities can be detected, (4) that awareness of sequencing rules can provide signals that one should search for and should supply certain information that is not available in the sentence.[2]

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[2]A major question remains as to which features of discourse are language-specific and which are language-universal. Unfortunately, the answer is not readily available to us at this time, although some current investigations are beginning to provide evidence. Of course, if a given feature is language-specific, the ESL student must receive instruction and practice in its use. On the other hand, even though a given feature might be language-universal, the particular form it takes in English and the fact that it must be attended to are matters that also deserve attention in the ESL listening classroom.

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3. Listening Instruction and Practice - What, then, does our examination of advanced ESL listeners' capacities and the information potentially available to listeners in a discourse tell us about the instruction and practice that advanced ESL students need? I will suggest here that a three-phase program in listening instruction and practice is called for, based on the data we have considered. The phases are as follows:

Phase 1 - practice in achieving accuracy and familiarity with the forms and meanings contained in spoken utterances.

Phase 2 - practice in reducing the amount of time necessary to process spoken utterances and in creating time left over.

Phase 3 - instruction in the features of discourse available to the listener and accompanying practice in utilizing those features in the time left over from processing single utterances.

3.1. Phase 1: If ESL students are to expand their memory spans, it appears that not only must they improve their ability to recognize items in sentences accurately, but they must also be able to allocate their processing time appropriately among low and high information items. To accomplish these goals, what I call Imitation Exercises are called for. Materials designed by Morley (1974), called Listening/Writing: Understanding English Sentence Structure, have students write sentences from dictation, then indicate multiple-choice responses based on their understanding of the sentences. To supplement the Morley exercises, an Oral Imitation Exercise is helpful. An utterance is read to the students or presented by interruption of a film, tape, or class discussion. While one student in the class attempts to imitate the utterance, other members of the class listen to his response for corrections to be made or for questions about difficult items to perceive.

6. Teacher: Yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it.

Student: Yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it.

Essentially, what the students are doing in the Imitation Exercises is gaining accuracy in discriminating difficult sentences and sounds by focusing attention on them, such that, with practice, not only will the difficulties diminish, but so will the need to focus attention on them for discrimination.

In addition to practice on Imitation Exercises, which concentrates primarily on processing the form of the utterance, practice in gaining accuracy in understanding the meanings of utterances is necessary. To accomplish this, an Oral Paraphrase Exercise is helpful. Students are presented with a spoken utterance or pair of utterances, and one student is to rephrase the message in his own words.

7. Teacher: Yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it.

Student: You mean something happened on Thursday, February 6, that exemplifies it.

Again, additions and corrections are made by other students, but in addition, shifts in emphasis or implication can be discussed when they distort the original meaning. This type of exercise is well-suited to group discussion situations, for students can be instructed to use the common clarification device, "Oh, you mean..." or "I see! What you're saying is..." at any point in their discussion of the day's topic.

The Paraphrase Exercise forces students to attend to the form of the spoken utterance and to extract the meanings accurately. In actuality, the Paraphrase Exercise serves as a transition between

Phase 1 and Phase 2. The Imitation Exercise requires only that time be spent processing the sentence for listening and processing the same sentence again for production. On the other hand, the Paraphrase Exercise requires not only that the original sentence be processed for listening but that, in addition, a new sentence be processed for production. Processing the new sentence forces the student to retain the original sentence in memory and, in some sense, to "create" extra time for performing the additional processing activity.

3.2 Phase 2: Given that students achieve a certain degree of accuracy and familiarity through the exercises of Phase 1, a second phase is necessary to create extra time to be used ultimately for processing features of discourse.[3]

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[3]While it is assumed here that an increase in memory span follows from gaining accuracy and familiarity with the elements in a spoken utterance, it is not assumed that an increase in time left over automatically follows from increasing memory span.

In the face of incomplete psycholinguistic data, I will suggest that a likely way to create extra time is to push students to do more with an utterance than to simply process the forms and meanings expressed within its boundaries.

As has been mentioned, a Paraphrase Exercise forces a student to perform an operation in addition to the processing of the original sentence. Another type of exercise is suggested by Pike's paired-sentence reversal technique. In a Reversal Exercise, students are presented with one or more sentences containing, for example, two events or two propositions. One student

is then asked to reverse the order of the events or propositions and make appropriate grammatical adjustments.

8. Teacher: Well that's a way of communicating with people but without using words. For example, gestures and movements.

Student: Well, an example is gestures and movements. They allow you to communicate with people even if you don't use any words.

Other students are available to make corrections and enter into discussion of the discourse relations that are or are not maintained in the response. Other types of transformation exercise can be used also, but always with the awareness that different transformations represent different complexities of processing.[4]

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[4]It should be recognized before going on to Phase 3 that the attempt to expand students' amount of time left over from processing spoken utterances may be only indirectly served by the exercises of Phase 2. The operations students perform in completing the tasks might be imposed on only the recall process and not on the comprehension process at all. However, it seems likely that during comprehension, students anticipate performance and perhaps even initiate some steps toward processing the extra operations. If so, they would indeed be creating some extra time during comprehension.

3.3. Phase 3: Given that students are able to create more time left over by doing the exercises of Phase 2, it is necessary also to direct their use of that time toward relating utterances to what precedes and follows in the discourse. It is at this phase that the first direct instruction per se is required in addition to practice.[5]

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[5]In the two preceding phases, improvement was possible only through practice; lectures in language processing, memory capacities, and retention procedures would produce only intellectualization with no progress. In Phase 3, by contrast, features of discourse which are English-language specific need to be referred to when the language specific features rely on them for explication.

In general, instruction for Phase 3 should touch on linguistic devices used for specifying relationships and attaining cohesion in discourse and in subunits of discourse, i.e., the ways in which continuities such as tense and definiteness can be detected. Instruction should also cover linguistic devices for specifying relationships between subunits of discourse which represent changes in continuities, i.e., the signals for transitional relations such as are found in terminators and initiators. Students should be led to observe, for example, that in English, time continuity is signalled by continuity of tense, that alteration from that continuity is signalled by such words and phrases as before that, previously, and earlier still, as well as by tense change. They should further observe that the differences between, for example, earlier and earlier still, are significant for being able to comprehend time development in a discourse.

Practice for Phase 3 involves pushing students to process discourse features using the time left over from processing utterances. Reversal and other transformation exercises help to serve this purpose in part, but more direct practice in using the time left over is available in exercises like those suggested by Hughes (1974) for developing predictive and retrospective listening skills.

Retrospective Listening Exercises involve stopping at some point in a discourse and asking students to recall what has preceded. Because Hughes' interest is in designing materials for the laboratory, he is restricted to having students check an answer sheet for the topic they identify as having been discussed.

In the classroom, we are less constrained, so a variation on the Paraphrase Exercise can be used to suit our purposes. The Oral Retrospective Listening Exercise suggested here is basically the same as Hughes' in the presentation, but in the response students are to paraphrase or summarize what has preceded.

9. Teacher: Well nonverbal communication is a way of communicating with people but without using words. For example, gestures and movements. Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it.

Student: You mean you think nonverbal communication with people is when you don't use words but use gestures and movements, and you're going to give us an example of it now by telling us what happened yesterday.

In order to perform the task accurately, students must be attending to the meanings and relations expressed in the discourse and demonstrate their awareness of those meanings and relations in their responses.

A Predictive Listening Exercise involves stopping at some point in a discourse and asking students to predict what is likely to come next. To perform the task, the student must be attending to the features of discourse that signal the types of topic development being pursued, and at the same time he must draw on his knowledge of how a continuation of that type of topic development is likely to be realized. Thus, Predictive Listening Exercises incorporate a process of retrospective listening, as well as adding a new process.

10. Teacher: Well, nonverbal communication is a way of communicating with people but without using words. For example, gestures and movements. Uh, yesterday something happened that is a good illustration of it.

> Student: Oh, you mean you're about to tell us the first thing that happened or about a place where something happened that's an example of nonverbal communication.

In overview, all the exercises suggested above can be done with the same basic type of stimulus, i.e., they can be done with a teacher-read stimulus, with stoppage of a film or tape, or with interruption of an on-going discussion. Once instituted, all can be used in ten-to-twelve minute segments at the beginning or end of a class session, if not incorporated into other activity underway in the course. One disadvantage of all the exercises except the Imitation Exercises is that they are not adaptable to language laboratory use for the purposes advocated in this paper, due to the necessity of variable creative responses and variable feedback to those responses. However, this disadvantage is overcome by the number of advantages associated with involving students in creative language processing and with the exercises' adaptability to use in active situations. Examples have been shown from conversational material, but the approach is readily applied to lecture types of material for those adult learners who are preparing to enter universities. However, caution must be observed that instruction is appropriate to the different registers used in different listening situations.

4. Conclusions - There are undoubtedly additional types of instruction and practice that would be instrumental in improving listening skills for advanced ESL students, such as Hughes' inferential listening exercises or evaluative listening exercises. However, in this paper I have tried to confine my comments to proposals for the use of instructional approaches and practice

materials that have a basis in one type of psycholinguistic data on how advanced ESL listeners process spoken English and in linguistic data about what is available and probably necessary for them to process while trying to understand spoken English discourse. Unfortunately, the psycholinguistic data relevant to ESL students' processing of discourse is sparse in some areas, so several inferences had to be drawn in the above discussion. Similarly, linguistic investigations of discourse are still in an early stage of development, so research on such distinctions as which discourse features are language-universal and which are language-specific remains to be completed. Nonetheless, I feel confident that by basing attempts to construct instructional materials and approaches on both psycholinguistic and linguistic findings, especially with an eye to spoken discourse, we can not help but improve our attempts to help ESL students develop their listening skills.

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